



Thursday, January 31, 2008
12:10 pm, Walter Hall

A Lecture by George Tsontakis

Roger D. Moore Distinguished Visitor in Composition

In December, 2006, George Tsontakis was named the next recipient of the Charles Ives Living by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The prestigious award is in the form of a cash allowance spread over 3 years (2007-2010) to allow the composer to concentrate on composition, and during which time he must take a sabbatical from other salaried employment. Thus, in the space of two years, Tsontakis has been awarded two of composition's richest prizes, since his Violin Concerto No. 2 also won the 2005 University of Louisville Grawemeyer Award. This celebrated international composition award gives deserved recognition to a composer who already enjoys a global career. Other previous awards include the American Academy's award for lifetime achievement in 1995; and in 2002, Tsontakis spent several months at the American Academy in Berlin as a result of the 2002 Berlin Prize (Alberto Vilar Fellowship). He also served as the first Composer-in-Residence with the Oxford Philomusica (England) from 1998-2002.

Mr. Tsontakis's catalogue continues to grow dramatically as prominent orchestras and musicians commission and record new works. The 2005-06 season featured premieres of his Third Piano Quartet (Opus One Quartet), his Fifth String Quartet (Cypress Quartet) and a Piano Concerto, Man of Sorrows (Stephen Hough and Dallas Symphony), as well as performances by the Chicago, American, Albany, Jerusalem and Oregon Symphonies, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Athens State Orchestra. Pianist Stephen Hough performed Tsontakis's epic Ghost Variations (nominated for a Grammy for Best Composition) at the 2006 Salzburg Festival and on the Paris-Louvre Series. Mr. Tsontakis's music consistently enjoys performances by the world's most prestigious orchestras, and in some of the world's most vaunted concert halls. The Millennium season alone brought performances to a dozen European countries in such venues as Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Berlin's Philharmonic Hall, London's Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore Halls, Oxford's Sheldonian, Radio France, Auditorium Bank de Luxembourg, Athen's Megaron and Oslo's Gamle Logen. In the late 1990s, six CDs representing his works were released, including his acclaimed Four Symphonic Quartets with James DePreist and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo on the Koch label, and Stephen Hough's monumental Hyperion recording of the Ghost Variations, nominated for a Grammy for Best Contemporary Classical Composition, and the only classical recording cited in TIME magazine's 1998 Top Ten Recordings. Two recordings of Mr. Tsontakis's piano chamber music were released on Koch International Classics in November, 2004, featuring the Broyhill Chamber Ensemble and Da Camera of Houston.

The Grawemeyer Award-winning Violin Concerto No. 2 was written for violinist Steven Copes and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and premiered in 2003. Other recent premieres have included a percussion concerto, Mirologhia (2001), for Evelyn Glennie, with the National Symphony at Carnegie Hall, and a horn concerto, Shiver (2002), for soloist David Jolley with the 20th Century Unlimited Orchestra in Santa Fe; as well as October, a work for the Baltimore Symphony; he was also commissioned for a work to inaugurate the Aspen Music Festival's acclaimed Benedict Music Tent in 2000, as well as a violin concerto for Cho-Liang Lin (Violin Concerto No. 1) with the Oregon and Albany Symphonies. Mr. Tsontakis has written a piano concerto, Man of Sorrows, for Stephen Hough with the Dallas Symphony, under the direction of Andrew Litton, which was premiered in September, 2005. He has composed works for the American, Blair, Colorado and Emerson string quartets, Da Camera of Houston, the American Brass Quintet, Orpheus, flutist Ransom Wilson, violinist Glenn Dicterow, violist Lawrence Dutton with pianist Misha Dichter, the New York Virtuoso Singers, the Broyhill Chamber ensemble, the Aspen Wind Quintet, Aureole and numerous American orchestras and ensembles.

Mr. Tsontakis has twice been a winner of Kennedy Center Awards — in 1989 for String Quartet No. 4 and in 1992 for the orchestral work Perpetual Angelus. He studied composition with Roger Sessions at Juilliard and conducting with Jorge Mester, and has directed the Riverside Orchestra and the Metropolitan Greek Choral. A faculty member of the Aspen Music School since 1976, he was the founding director of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble from 1991 until 1998. Mr. Tsontakis served as Composer-in-Residence with the Music from Angel Fire festival in summer, 2005. In September of that year, he began a 3-year Meet the Composer residency with the Albany Symphony. He is Distinguished Composer-in-Residence at Bard College.

Mr. Tsontakis's music has been recorded on the Hyperion, INNOVA, New World, CRI, Koch and Opus One labels and is published exclusively by Theodore Presser.